



INFLUENZA

What is INFLUENZA?

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. There are two main types of influenza viruses: type A and type B. Each type has many different subtypes or strains. Type A influenza causes moderate to severe illness. Type B causes milder disease and primarily affects children. Influenza can occur throughout the year, but seasonally peaks from December to March.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, extreme fatigue, sore, throat, runny nose, cough and nasal congestion. Occasionally, intestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain are present, but should not be confused with the "stomach flu."

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread from person-to-person by direct contact with airborne particles or large droplets from the respiratory tract of the infected person when coughing, sneezing, or talking. Transmission can also occur through articles recently contaminated by secretions from the nose and throat of the infected person. Hand washing and avoiding or limiting contact with an infected person may reduce the risk of infection.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of influenza usually appear one to five days after exposure.

How long can a person spread influenza?

Persons are most contagious during the 24 hours before symptoms appear and may be contagious for up to 7 days.

How is influenza diagnosed?

The diagnosis on influenza is usually based on symptoms. For a laboratory-confirmed diagnosis, the virus is detected in specimens collected from the throat or nose by culture or a rapid test.

What is the treatment of influenza?

Basic treatment includes bed rest, fluids and over-the-counter medications for the relief of symptoms of runny nose, cough, sore throat, fever and discomfort. Aspirin should not be used for infants, children, or teenagers because of the associated risk for contracting Reye Syndrome. Antiviral medications may reduce the severity and shorten the duration of influenza type A in healthy adults when administered within 48 hours of illness onset. These drugs may have side effects and must be ordered by a physician.

24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156

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Can influenza be prevented?

Annual influenza vaccination is up to 90% effective in preventing influenza in young healthy adults and 30% to 40% effective in preventing illness among elderly persons. Influenza vaccine is updated annually to match the circulating strain of Influenza and provides protection for approximately one year. The vaccine should be taken each fall, between October and mid-November. If unable to get the vaccine in the fall, the vaccine can still be taken anytime during the flu season. It takes about one to two weeks for the antibody to develop and provide protection. Talk to your physician to see if the influenza vaccine is right for you.

Who should get the vaccine?

- Individuals 50 years of age and older;
- Long term care facility (nursing homes and other such institutions) patients or residents;
- Individuals above the age of 24 months with chronic medical conditions (these include diabetes, heart or kidney disease, neurological illness, pulmonary disease, etc.); Also includes children on long term aspirin therapy and anyone with a compromised immune system;
- Children from 6 to 23 months;
- Women who are or will be pregnant before the end of flu season;
- Health care workers in direct patient care; and
- Individuals who reside in a household with at-risk individuals.